

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
PROPOSED WHITE ROCK DAM REMOVAL PROJECT
STONINGTON, CONNECTICUT AND WESTERLY, RHODE ISLAND**

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), in partnership with The Nature Conservancy and other partners, is proposing to remove the White Rock Dam on the Pawcatuck River in Stonington, Connecticut and Westerly, Rhode Island. The purpose of the proposed Project is to restore unimpeded passage for migratory fish in the Pawcatuck River, mitigate flooding impacts from storms, and eliminate the danger of dam failure and associated impacts to downstream communities and infrastructure.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulation [CFR] 1500-1508), and the implementing regulation (36 CFR 800). The EA analyzes the potential impacts of four alternatives on the human environment. These alternatives include a No Action Alternative, the Proposed Action (preferred alternative), and two additional action alternatives.

The Proposed Action involves full removal of the Dam and left and right concrete training walls, limited excavation of sediment downstream of the existing dam, and construction of a permanent barrier at the upstream end of the former mill raceway to optimize fish passage in the natural river reach. Under Alternative 1, the Dam would be removed, but no sediment excavation or barrier in the raceway channel would occur. Under Alternative 2, the Dam would be removed, sediment excavated, and a barrier would be placed in the downstream end of the raceway channel. Under the No Action Alternative, the Dam would be left in place and historical spawning and rearing habitat would continue to be inaccessible to migratory fishes, and the Dam would continue to exacerbate flooding during storm events.

The Proposed Action will have negligible, and in some cases beneficial impacts on natural and cultural resources such as water and air quality, sediment chemistry, threatened and endangered species, fish and wildlife resources, wetlands, and public recreation and safety. Adverse effects to cultural resources, including National Register-eligible or listed cultural resources, will be addressed, pursuant to section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 W.S.C. 470f), through a Memorandum of Agreement between the Service, the Rhode Island Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission, and consulting parties (36 CFR Part 800, and 33 CFR Part 325). There were no objections to the proposed action from the Mashantucket Pequot, the Mohegan, or the Narragansett Tribal Historic Preservation Officers.

During the permitting process, 30-day public comment periods were held for the Army Corps of Engineers Programmatic General Permit and for both the State of Rhode Island and State of Connecticut Water Quality Permits. A 45-day public comment period was held for the Rhode Island Wetlands Regulations review. Additionally, there have been a number of public stakeholder meetings, including meetings with the Rhode Island Canoe and

Kayak Association on October 27, 2014, an information workshop open to all interested paddlers in Rhode Island and Connecticut on November 29, 2014, and a public workshop in Westerly, Rhode Island to provide an overview of the Project background, proposed alterations, and the Project's ecological and flood risk reduction benefits, on December 3, 2014. This extensive public involvement has resulted in resounding support from residents, paddling enthusiasts, and public officials.

Based on review and evaluation of the environmental effects as presented in the EA, the Service has determined that the White Rock Dam Removal Project is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. The Project will result in a net ecological benefit to the Pawcatuck River, and would complement ongoing interagency efforts to restore migratory fish to the Pawcatuck River watershed and the Atlantic Coast. Therefore, the Service has determined that a Finding of No Significant Impact be issued for the proposed Project.

Date

17 July 2015



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Reference:

Environmental Assessment, dated July 17, 2015